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ABSTRACT

The question of who develops and adopts the rules and regulations to implement educational policies is at the center of the role controversy between boards of education and superintendents. The purpose of this paper is to clarify the demarcations between policy-making and administrative roles. Certain assumptions about board and superintendent relationships determine perceptions of policy-making and administrative roles: the board of education has the ultimate responsibility for the schools; every local board of education has some relationship with its state board; the board of education selects, directs, and evaluates the superintendent; board members represent the community; and, there is a great difference in how board members define their role in policy-making and administration. In practice, there is no single definite line between policy and administration. It is up to the board and superintendent to set working definitions. Some guides to help reach agreements are to know what is supposed to be, know the reality, know what can be, and know the pitfalls. (Author/MLF)

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POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION: WHO DOES WHAT?

A. The Current Dilemma of Control of Education

The power struggle over who controls education has created a disillusioned public, a frustrated group of citizens called school board members, and job-hopping educators called superintendents. The disillusioned public is questioning how well we are educating today's children. Board members are caught between the angry public's cries for a responsive educational system and educators who firmly state: "Keep out of administration. We experts know what is best! "

New school board members are told that their role is to set policy. "Stay out of administration. That is the province of the superintendent." It all sounds so simple and straightforward, but just try it.

The perplexed school board member responds: " I find that the things I want and promised to do are called administration. I represent the community, and I know that things are not right in the schools. I'm told that the educators are the experts. They know best. I could do more as a private citizen than I can now. What am I doing as a school board member?"

Experienced school board members frequently list a number of grievances:
1. We spend weeks and hours hearing from the public. We hear staff recommendations and argue among ourselves. We think we have set a policy, and then we find that very few people have any knowledge of the policy. Things go on as before.

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2. Whenever there is a furor, it is the board that must mollify the public. 3. We never know what is happening until the press calls us. The superintendent explains that he is trying to protect us. 4. We only get half of the information - after the fact. 5. We are snowed under by paper and still don't know anything. 6. Whatever the superintendent wants to do is administration - the rest is policy. 7. We spend hours talking about the details of things that have little to do with what happens to kids in school. 8. The superintendent confides in some board members. He manipulates the board by playing on the individual's favorite issues. 9. We never know what a decision will cost or what it will do at the school level. 10. We don't seem to be able to control our agendas.[1]

The superintendent could also prepare a long list of grievances.[2] Finally, being worn out from struggling with the board, the superintendent might say: " We've got real trouble here. We meet every night. I have to consult the board on everything. They are trying to run the school system. No lay group can make these day to day decisions. I'm looking for another place where I can do my job!"

Hugh J. Scott, former superintendent of D.C. Public Schools said: "The time has arrived either to upgrade the large urban superintendency or to eliminate it. There is, of course, a job that needs to be done. But I doubt it can be done with the present typical structural arrangement. If the superintendency in the big cities is to be approached seriously by competent and dedicated individuals, then legislative reform is urgently needed. The citizenry must prod appropriate bodies to enact legislation establishing an equitable balance in the assignment of responsibility for policy formulation and administrative action. We need new mechanisms short of dismissal for the resolution of board/superintendent conflicts and differences. Such legislation would recognize the limits on what can be reasonably be expected from a schod board and school superintendent."[3]

Proposed solutions to this dilemma include the abolition of local boards of education. Alternatives are: an education commissioner or superintendent under the mayor or local executive; complete centralized state control under the governor or state board of education; centralized federal control; and decentralized community school boards.

The battle over policy and administration is a war over who controls education. Historically, schools are the primary users of tax dollars. They are also one of the most complained about and controversial responsibilities of government. The difficult decisions made by superintendents and boards of education continuously jar the peace of other officials and agencies. At the same time, boards and superintendents are stuck with responsibilities affecting children that the home, the community and other agencies refuse to assume. Other divisions of government who may seek to place the schools under their control, can point to the battle between boards and superintendents as further evidence of the present system's inability to educate children.

Within the educational bureauocracy itself, the struggles of power blocs may weaken the ability of the board of education and superintendent to solve problems and make decisions. Some of these educators who protect their little feifdoms are in key positions to advise the superintendent and to provide the rationale and options for the policies proposed by the superintendent to the board. These same educators can deter or implement the board policies. The superintendent must be in the favor or in charge of his own employees or he can be destroyed and replaced by a superintendent who will protect their interests.

Board members are either elected or appointed by their own power bases with the understandings or promises that they will do certain things and perhaps even leave certain things unchanged. These philosophical or political involvements frequently lead to the inability of a board to come to grips with policy decisions necessary for the administration of the schools. Ironically, the board member who recognizes some of these problems may be rendered powerless to facilitate changes by his own board colleagues,

the superintendent, the power blocs within the system, vested interests within the community, or even by his own growing hostility.

B. A Brief History of Policy and Administration in American Education

The differences over policy and administration were not apparent in the early history of American education. During the colonial era, the family unit, the school and the church were a triumvirate. Almost every one in the early settlements was related to a real or surrogate family. The family was responsible for teaching the individuals to learn, work, live and worship together. The first schools were supported by the families. They stressed reading, 'riting, 'rithmetic, and moral and spiritual values. Later as tuition and taxes were required to form schools in the settlement, the families took an active role in the selection of teachers and the curriculum and the operation of the school. Finally, the parents and community selected trustees or committees to directly oversee the day to day operations of the school.

The early 1800's was a time of one room schools and small school districts with community control. School trustees and committees believed their responsibilities to be administrative as well as policy making. As urbanization took place, the city school committees were frequently tied to the local government politics. Corruption and favoritism in government was common-place in schools as well. At the same time, school boards or committees found it impossible to spend all the time required to supervise the schools. The role of a paid clerk or supervisor emerged into an undefined role of superintedent. The superintendent was selected by the school board or sometimes was an elected official.

From 1890 through the 1900's, the reorganization of educational structures resulted in a trend to remove district school boards from politics by the creation of centralized school boards with professional supervision by a superintendent. As superintendents became full-time professionals, it became an accepted agreement that school boards should be involved in policy-making and leave the administration of the school system to their superintendent. State laws began to separate the policy-making role of boards and administrative role of the professional by defining the powers and roles of superintendent and board.

Traditionally, Americans have valued education as the road to success. Educators were placed on pedestals and regarded as knowing what is best. In the early 1900's, the colleges of education and the universities created the professional educators as experts by establishing teacher and administrator training programs and degrees. The illusion that administrators could solve all problems for school boards and parents was reinforced by titles and degrees. One of the major problems of today's educators is the decrease of this prestige in the eyes of the public.

C. Definitions and Assumptions

A definition of policy is -"a definite course or method of action selected to guide and determine present and future decisions..." Policy may be thought of as a framework to establish the limits of action to those carrying out the directions of the board. Policy may be thought of as guidelines while regulations are mandated directions on how the policy shall be put into effect. Another way to think of policy is that the board makes value judgments that set the parameters for action. Administration can be described as the decisions and management of the day to day operations of the schools. It is the implementation of the board's policies and involves the interpretation of the intent of the board.

The question of who develops and adopts the rules and regulations to implement the policies is at the center of the role controversy. Most board orientations emphasize the development of rules and regulations by the administration. In Maryland, the Education Article 4-107 states that - "Each county board shall;..... determine, with the advice of the county superintendent, the educational policies of the county school system; and Adopt, codify, and make available to the public bylaws, rules and regulations not inconsistent with State law, for the conduct and management of the county public schools. (Underlining is my own.) Please note: Adopt rules and regulations. Most boards in Maryland permit the superintendent and staff to formulate, adopt and codify the rules and regulations to implement board policy as long as they do not conflict with or extend the meaning of the policy.

This formulation and adoption of rules and regulations by the administration is the generally accepted line between policy and administration. Some boards prefer not to delegate this to the superintendent and staff. Instead, they take an active role in formulating, modifying and adopting rules and regulations to meet their own policy intent.

Let us clarify certain assumptions about board and superintendent relationships that determine our perceptions of policy-making and administrative roles:

1.) We assume that the board of education, as a corporate body, has the ultimate responsibility for the schools within the state laws and bylaws of the state board of education. This means that the board is in charge of the schools and delegates some of its responsibilities to the superintendent. While some of the prerogatives of the superintendent are defined in state laws, the board of education is responsible for what happens to the children, how effectively the system operates, how public resources are used, and for the superintendent's performance of his job. Even with the intrusion of legislators, federal and state agencies, courts and politicians into policy and administration, the board is also responsible for the implementation of their mandates. We lament these intrusions, but we must recognize the tremendous power and responsibility of the board of education. The checks and balances of public opinion, school system power blocs, the community, the press, the courts, other government officials and legislators are there and must be understood.

2.)We assume that every local board of education has some relationship with its state board. In D.C. and U.S. territories, the local board is the state board. The state legislature through its state laws defines the

powers and roles and responsibilities of the state board and local boards of education. Certainly, the state board can have a great effect on what local boards do. There is a great variance in how much control the state board assumes. A strong state visitation role may mean that the local board is bypassed as the state superintendent and his staff work closely with the local superintendent. You as a local board may not realize it is happening.

3.) We assume that, in most cases, the board of education selects, directs and evaluates the superintendent. This process can be a means of communication which helps the board and superintendent define their relationship, expectations of each other, system goals and future plans. This is the point at which the agreements about what is policy and what is administration can be made. This assumes that while the superintendent is an employee of the board, he can be a valuable team member. In the situations where the superintendent is elected or appointed by someone else and has separately defined roles and responsibilities, there will be a need to negotiate a working relationship.

4.) We assume that references to schools usually "highlight" the superintendent and rarely the board. The superintendent represents the school system and tremendous visibility and power. He or she probably has an extensive following in the community, the school system and among board members. This is the public expert in education who is usually very persuasive. The employees of the system tend to pay their allegiance to the superintendent. Their advice and staff work on issues determines the credibility of the superintendent with his board. If the superintendent is not in the favor of his staff, he (she) may be giving the board advice or recommendations that are politically unfavorable. When the board selects a superintendent from outside to fulfil certain policy mandates, the superintendent may be rendered impotent to fulfil the board's directions

by the power blocs in the system. Furthermore, these same blocs can kill a policy through skillful non-implementation or implmentation that raises hostilities.

5.) We assume that board members represent the community. A 1975 Gallup Poll[4] indicated that a third of the adult respondents felt school board members were "excellent or good" in representing the views and opinions of people like themselves. Another third said "fair or poor" and almost another third "didn't know". Research by Ziegler and Boss[5] shows that school board members do not perceive their role as that of representatives of their communities. It seems that board members often appear to become representatives of the establishment because of their dependency upon the recommendations and advice and information of the superintendent and his staff. These board members tend to deal with operational problems of the system such as finance, personnel and curriculum more than with the problems which the community considers important. Other research by Ziegler and Peak[6] indicates that when a board sees itself as representing the community, recognizes and deals with the problems identified by community, there is a greater impact on educational policy by the board.

6.) We assume that a public relations/information officer for the system assures adequate communication with the public. Gallup Polls indicated that most citizens form their opinions about schools by what they hear and read in the media. Parents of school children form their opinions by school communications, PTA participation, teachers, and from their own children.[7] It would be wise for school board members to reflect on their image in the media. Would you have confidence in the kind of board you appear to be in the media? Can the community know about your policies and give you feedback on the basis of what they know from the media? Perhaps the board itself needs to examine its responsibility to inform the public when it is considering policy changes and why it does what it does.

7.) We assume that there is a great difference in how board members define their role in policy-making and administration. Especially in smaller districts, the board may directly interview, hire and fire personnel, decide on student suspensions and expulsions; select school equipment and buses, and make curriculum and policy decisions. Regardless of size of the district, board members may still vote on the superintendent's recommendations for purchases and personnel; while in other districts, the board may delegate the superintendent the authority to make those decisions within certain

guidelines. In some larger districts and cities, board members serve on board sub-committees to perform many of these functions. Time, energy, board traditions and relationships with the superintendent can determine how a board will deal with these functions.

D. How To Determine "Who Does What?"

The purpose of this paper is to clarify the demarcations between policy-making and administrative roles. It is easy to give you the dictionary definitions. It is a bit harder to clarify the "accepted definitions" used in orienting new school board members. In practice, there is no single definite line between policy and administration. It is up to you as a board member with your board and superintendent to set your own working definitions. Some guides to help you reach agreements are: 1. Know what is supposed to be. 2. Know the reality 3. Know what can be. and 4. Know the pitfalls.

1. Know what is supposed to be: What are the legal roles and responsibilities of the board and superintendent in your own local and state laws? Who is ultimately responsible for the school system and the success of the children? What does it mean to be a corporate body? What authority can be delegated? What are the local and state written policies, bylaws, guidelines, rules and regulations?

2. Know the reality: Do the superintendent and board accept and fulfil their legal roles and responsibilities? Who is actually in charge of the schools? Does the board act as a corporate body? Do the board and superintendent follow unwritten traditions? Do the board and superintendent have agreements on policy-making and administrative roles? Do the board and superintendent know the written policies? Are there unwritten policies or procedures that are "pulled out" and used when convenient? Are the written policies up-to-date, inter-related and codified? How are the policies interpreted - by whom? Do these interpretations fulfil the intent of the board? Does the board have a process for developing policies, which includes the community and local school people? Does the board receive adequate data and options? Does the board have an adequate reporting system with

indicators on how well the policy is working? Are the policies being implemented? If not, why not? What are the power blocs and political interests that must be considered when developing and implementing policy? Are the superintendent and board "happy" with the present ways of doing things? What changes would each like to propose?

3. Know what can be: - There can be a goal and priority setting evaluation process with the superintendent which will clarify the expectations of the board. - Talking with the superintendent could make it easier to work together. - Define in writing what you wish to accomplish. Set priorities for your time and energy as an individual, a board, superintendent and the school system. - The board can have direct control over its agendas and issues it considers important. - Agreements on policy-making and administrative roles can be as varied as desired, but there are pitfalls in going to extremes. - Policies can and should be written in a clear and definite form and available to all. The board can initiate a study of its written and unwritten policies to be sure that they are adequate and inter-related and up-to-date. - There can be a policy monitoring and feed-back mechanism for assuring policy implementation. - The board and superintendent can assure the confidence in the public schools by a communication plan.

4. Know the pitfalls: - Disagreements with the present board and superintendent can push you into isolation or make you into a cynic. - Watch out that you don't become passive or a captive of the establishment. - You will be devoured by detail unless the board sets priorities for use of its time and energy. - When you delegate authority to the superintendent or board members, follow-up on what is happening. - Be aware of vested interests and power blocs and their power to keep policy from being developed and implemented. -Don't assume that firing the superintendent is the answer to your problems. Be sure the superintendent knows what the board expects and enable him (her) to do it.

And finally, most important of all, be sure that while you are worrying about " Who Does What?" that you don't miss out on why you are there - the education of the children.

[1]Mullins, Carolyn. "Board Members Pinpoint The Kinds Of Superintendents That Embarrass Their Peers And Embattle Their Boards", AMERICAN SCHOOL BOARD JOURNAL, February 1975, Evanston, Illinois

[2]Mullins, Carolyn. "The Way That School Boards Drive Their Superintendents Up The Wall", AMERICAN SCHOOL BOARD JOURNAL, August 1974, Evanston, Illinois

[3]Scott, Hugh J. "The Urban Superintendency On The Brink", PHI DELTA KAPPAN, December 1976, Bloomington, Indiana

[4]Research Report, "The People Look At Their School Boards", National School Boards Association, 1975, Evanston, Illinois

[5]Ziegler, Harmon, and Michael O. Boss. "Pressure Groups and Public Policy: The Case in Education." In Robert Stodaro, et al., The Policy Vacuum. New York: Lexington Books, 1975.

[6]Ziegler, Harmon, M. Kent Jennings, and G. Wayne Peak. Governing American Schools. North Scituate, Mass.: Duxbury. 1974.

[7]Research Report. "The People Look At Their School Boards", National School Boards Association, 1975, Evanston, Illinois